

GC 88: The Great Advent Movement

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21. A Warning Rejected

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In preaching the doctrine of the second advent, William Miller and his associates had labored with the sole purpose of arousing men to a preparation for the judgment. They had sought to awaken professors of religion to the true hope of the church and to their need of a deeper Christian experience, and they labored also to awaken the unconverted to the duty of immediate repentance and conversion to God. "They made no attempt to convert men to a sect or party in religion. Hence they labored among all parties and sects, without interfering with their organization or discipline."

"In all my labors," said Miller, "I never had the desire or thought to establish any separate interest from that of existing denominations, or to benefit one at the expense of another. I thought to benefit all. Supposing that all Christians would rejoice in the prospect of Christ's coming, and that those who could not see as I did would not love any the less those who should embrace this doctrine, I did not conceive there would ever be any necessity for separate meetings. My whole object was a desire to convert souls to God, to notify the world of a coming judgment, and to induce my fellow men to make that preparation of heart which will enable them to meet their God in peace. The great majority of those who were converted under my labors united with the various existing churches."-Bliss, page 328.

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As his work tended to build up the churches, it was for a time regarded with favor. But as ministers and religious leaders decided against the advent doctrine and desired to suppress all agitation of the subject, they not only opposed it from the pulpit, but denied their members the privilege of attending preaching upon the second advent, or even of speaking of their hope in the social meetings of the church. Thus the believers found themselves in a position of great trial and perplexity. They loved their churches and were loath to separate from them; but as they saw the testimony of God's word suppressed and their right to investigate the prophecies denied they felt that loyalty to God forbade them to submit. Those who sought to shut out the testimony of God's word they could not regard as constituting the church of Christ, "the pillar and ground of the truth." Hence they felt themselves justified in separating from their former connection. In the summer of 1844 about fifty thousand withdrew from the churches.

About this time a marked change was apparent in most of the churches throughout the United States. There had been for many years a gradual but steadily increasing conformity to worldly practices and customs, and a corresponding decline in real spiritual life; but in that year there were evidences of a sudden and marked declension in nearly all the churches of the land. While none seemed able to suggest the cause, the fact itself was widely noted and commented upon by both the press and the pulpit.

At a meeting of the presbytery of Philadelphia, Mr. Barnes, author of a commentary widely used and pastor of one of the leading churches in that city, "stated that he had been in the ministry for twenty years, and never, till the last Communion, had he administered the ordinance without receiving more or less into the church. But now there are no awakenings, no conversions, not much apparent growth in grace in professors, and none come to his study to converse about the salvation of their souls. With the increase of business, and the brightening prospects of commerce and manufacture, there is an increase of worldly-mindedness. Thus it is with all the denominations." --Congregational Journal, May 23, 1844.

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In the month of February of the same year, Professor Finney of Oberlin College said: "We have had the fact before our minds, that, in general, the Protestant churches of our country, as such, were either apathetic or hostile to nearly all the moral reforms of the age. There are partial exceptions, yet not enough to render the fact otherwise than general. We have also another corroborated fact: the almost universal absence of revival influence in the churches. The spiritual apathy is almost all-pervading, and is fearfully deep; so the religious press of the whole land testifies. . . . Very extensively, church members are becoming devotees of fashion, --join hands with the ungodly in parties of pleasure, in dancing, in festivities, etc. . . . But we need not expand this painful subject. Suffice it that the evidence thickens and rolls heavily upon us, to show that the churches generally are becoming sadly degenerate . They have gone very far from the Lord, and He has withdrawn Himself from them."

And a writer in the Religious Telescope testified: "We have never witnessed such a general declension of religion as at the present. Truly, the church should awake, and search into the cause of this affliction; for as an affliction everyone that loves Zion must view it. When we call to mind how 'few and far between' cases of true conversion are, and the almost unparalleled impertinence and hardness of sinners, we almost involuntarily exclaim, 'Has God forgotten to be gracious? or, Is the door of mercy closed?'"

Such a condition never exists without cause in the church itself. The spiritual darkness which falls upon nations, upon churches and individuals, is due, not to an arbitrary withdrawal of the succors of divine grace on the part of God, but to neglect or rejection of divine light on the part of men.

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A striking illustration of this truth is presented in the history of the Jewish people in the time of Christ. By their devotion to the world and forgetfulness of God and His word, their understanding had become darkened, their hearts earthly and sensual. Thus they were in ignorance concerning Messiah's advent, and in their pride and unbelief they rejected the Redeemer. God did not even then cut off the Jewish nation from a knowledge of, or a participation in, the blessings of salvation. But those who rejected the truth lost all desire for the gift of Heaven. They had "put darkness for light, and light for darkness," until the light which was in them became darkness; and how great was that darkness!

It suits the policy of Satan that men should retain the forms of religion if but the spirit of vital godliness is lacking. After their rejection of the gospel, the Jews continued zealously to maintain

their ancient rites, they rigorously preserved their national exclusiveness, while they themselves could not but admit that the presence of God was no longer manifest among them. The prophecy of Daniel pointed so unmistakably to the time of Messiah's coming, and so directly foretold His death, that they discouraged its study, and finally the rabbis pronounced a curse on all who should attempt a computation of the time. In blindness and impenitence the people of Israel during succeeding centuries have stood, indifferent to the gracious offers of salvation, unmindful of the blessings of the gospel, a solemn and fearful warning of the danger of rejecting light from heaven.

Wherever the cause exists, the same results will follow. He who deliberately stifles his convictions of duty because it interferes with his inclinations will finally lose the power to distinguish between truth and error. The understanding becomes darkened, the conscience callous, the heart hardened, and the soul is separated from God. Where the message of divine truth is spurned or slighted, there the church will be enshrouded in darkness; faith and love grow cold, and estrangement and dissension enter. Church members center their interests and energies in worldly pursuits, and sinners become hardened in their impenitence.

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The first angel's message of Revelation 14, announcing the hour of God's judgment and calling upon men to fear and worship Him, was designed to separate the professed people of God from the corrupting influences of the world and to arouse them to see their true condition of worldliness and backsliding. In this message, God has sent to the church a warning, which, had it been accepted, would have corrected the evils that were shutting them away from Him. Had they received the message from heaven, humbling their hearts before the Lord and seeking in sincerity a preparation to stand in His presence, the Spirit and power of God would have been manifested among them. The church would again have reached that blessed state of unity, faith, and love which existed in apostolic days, when the believers "were of one heart and of one soul," and "spake the word of God with boldness," when "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts 4:32, 31; 2:47.

If God's professed people would receive the light as it shines upon them from His word, they would reach that unity for which Christ prayed, that which the apostle describes, "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "There is," he says, "one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Ephesians 4:3-5.

Such were the blessed results experienced by those who accepted the advent message. They came from different denominations, and their denominational barriers were hurled to the ground; conflicting creeds were shivered to atoms; the unscriptural hope of a temporal millennium was abandoned, false views of the second advent were corrected, pride and conformity to the world were swept away; wrongs were made right; hearts were united in the sweetest fellowship, and love and joy reigned supreme. If this doctrine did this for the few who did receive it, it would have done the same for all if all had received it.

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But the churches generally did not accept the warning. Their ministers, who, as watchmen "unto the house of Israel," should have been the first to discern the tokens of Jesus' coming,

had failed to learn the truth either from the testimony of the prophets or from the signs of the times. As worldly hopes and ambitions filled the heart, love for God and faith in His word had grown cold; and when the advent doctrine was presented, it only aroused their prejudice and unbelief. The fact that the message was, to a great extent, preached by laymen, was urged as an instrument against it.

As of old, the plain testimony of God's word was met with the inquiry: "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed?" And finding how difficult a task it was to refute the arguments drawn from the prophetic periods, many discouraged the study of the prophecies, teaching that the prophetic books were sealed and were not to be understood. Multitudes, trusting implicitly to their pastors, refused to listen to the warning; and others, though convinced of the truth, dared not confess it, lest they should be "put out of the synagogue." The message which God had sent for the testing and purification of the church revealed all too surely how great was the number who had set their affections on this world rather than upon Christ. The ties which bound them to earth were stronger than the attractions heavenward. They chose to listen to the voice of worldly wisdom and turned away from the heart-searching message of truth.

In refusing the warning of the first angel, they rejected the means which Heaven had provided for their restoration. They spurned the gracious messenger that would have corrected the evils which separated them from God, and with greater eagerness they turned to seek the friendship of the world. Here was the cause of that fearful condition of worldliness, backsliding, and spiritual death which existed in the churches in 1844.

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In Revelation 14 the first angel is followed by a second proclaiming: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Revelation 14:8. The term "Babylon" is derived from "Babel," and signifies confusion. It is employed in Scripture to designate the various forms of false or apostate religion. In Revelation 17 Babylon is represented as a woman --a figure which is used in the Bible as the symbol of a church, a virtuous woman representing a pure church, a vile woman an apostate church.

In the Bible the sacred and enduring character of the relation that exists between Christ and His church is represented by the union of marriage. The Lord has joined His people to Himself by a solemn covenant, He promising to be their God, and they pledging themselves to be His and His alone. He declares: "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." Hosea 2:19. And, again: "I am married unto you." Jeremiah 3:14. And Paul employs the same figure in the New Testament when he says: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:2.

The unfaithfulness of the church to Christ in permitting her confidence and affection to be turned from Him, and allowing the love of worldly things to occupy the soul, is likened to the violation of the marriage vow. The sin of Israel in departing from the Lord is presented under this figure; and the wonderful love of God which they thus despised is touchingly portrayed: "I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine." "And thou wast exceeding beautiful and thou didst prosper into a kingdom.

And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee. . . . But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown." "As a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord;" "as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!" Ezekiel 16:8, 13-15, 32; Jeremiah 3:20.

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In the New Testament, language very similar is addressed to professed Christians who seek the friendship of the world above the favor of God. Says the apostle James: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

The woman (Babylon) of Revelation 17 is described as "arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness:...and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots." Says the prophet: "I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Babylon is further declared to be "that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." Revelation 17:4-6, 18. The power that for so many centuries maintained despotic sway over the monarchs of Christendom is Rome. The purple and scarlet color, the gold and precious stones and pearls, vividly picture the magnificence and more than kingly pomp affected by the haughty see of Rome. And no other power could be so truly declared "drunken with the blood of the saints" as that church which has so cruelly persecuted the followers of Christ. Babylon is also charged with the sin of unlawful connection with "the kings of the earth." It was by departure from the Lord, and alliance with the heathen, that the Jewish church became a harlot; and Rome, corrupting herself in like manner by seeking the support of worldly powers, receives a like condemnation.

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Babylon is said to be "the mother of harlots." By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14, announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation the people of God are called upon to come out of Babylon.

According to this scripture, many of God's people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? Without doubt, in the various churches professing the Protestant faith. At the time of their rise these churches took a noble stand for God and the truth, and His blessing was with them. Even the unbelieving world was constrained to acknowledge the beneficent results that followed an acceptance of the principles of the gospel. In the words of the prophet to Israel: "Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon

thee, saith the Lord God." But they fell by the same desire which was the curse and ruin of Israel--the desire of imitating the practices and courting the friendship of the ungodly. "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown." Ezekiel 16:14, 15.

Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome's example of iniquitous connection with "the kings of the earth"--the state churches, by their relation to secular governments; and other denominations, by seeking the favor of the world. And the term "Babylon"--confusion--may be appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories.

Besides a sinful union with the world, the churches that separated from Rome present other of her characteristics.

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A Roman Catholic work argues that "if the Church of Rome were ever guilty of idolatry in relation to the saints, her daughter, the Church of England, stands guilty of the same, which has ten churches dedicated to Mary for one dedicated to Christ."--Richard Challoner, *The Catholic Christian Instructed*, Preface, pages 21, 22.

And Dr. Hopkins, in "A Treatise on the Millennium," declares: "There is no reason to consider the antichristian spirit and practices to be confined to that which is now called the Church of Rome. The Protestant churches have much of antichrist in them, and are far from being wholly reformed from . . . corruptions and wickedness."--Samuel Hopkins, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 328.

Concerning the separation of the Presbyterian Church from Rome, Dr. Guthrie writes: "Three hundred years ago, our church, with an open Bible on her banner, and this motto, 'Search the Scriptures,' on her scroll, marched out from the gates of Rome." Then he asks the significant question: "Did they come clean out of Babylon?"--Thomas Guthrie, *The Gospel in Ezekiel*, page 237.

"The Church of England," says Spurgeon, "seems to be eaten through and through with sacramentarianism; but nonconformity appears to be almost as badly riddled with philosophical infidelity. Those of whom we thought better things are turning aside one by one from the fundamentals of the faith. Through and through, I believe, the very heart of England is honeycombed with a damnable infidelity which dares still go into the pulpit and call itself Christian."

What was the origin of the great apostasy? How did the church first depart from the simplicity of the gospel? By conforming to the practices of paganism, to facilitate the acceptance of Christianity by the heathen. The apostle Paul declared, even in his day, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." 2 Thessalonians 2:7. During the lives of the apostles the church remained comparatively pure. But "toward the latter end of the second century most of the churches assumed a new form; the first simplicity disappeared, and insensibly, as the old disciples retired to their graves, their children, along with new converts, . . . came forward and new-modeled the cause."--Robert Robinson, *Ecclesiastical Researches*, ch. 6, par. 17, p. 51.

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To secure converts, the exalted standard of the Christian faith was lowered, and as the result "a pagan flood, flowing into the church, carried with it its customs, practices, and idols." --Gavazzi, Lectures, page 278. As the Christian religion secured the favor and support of secular rulers, it was nominally accepted by multitudes; but while in appearance Christians, many "remained in substance pagans, especially worshipping in secret their idols."--Ibid., page 278.

Has not the same process been repeated in nearly every church calling itself Protestant? As the founders, those who possessed the true spirit of reform, pass away, their descendants come forward and "new-model the cause." While blindly clinging to the creed of their fathers and refusing to accept any truth in advance of what they saw, the children of the reformers depart widely from their example of humility, self-denial, and renunciation of the world. Thus "the first simplicity disappears." A worldly flood, flowing into the church, carries "with it its customs, practices, and idols."

Alas, to what a fearful extent is that friendship of the world which is "enmity with God," now cherished among the professed followers of Christ! How widely have the popular churches throughout Christendom departed from the Bible standard of humility, self-denial, simplicity, and godliness! Said John Wesley, in speaking of the right use of money: "Do not waste any part of so precious a talent, merely in gratifying the desire of the eye, by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments. Waste no part of it in curiously adorning your houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding. . . . Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men. . . . 'So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee.' So long as thou art 'clothed in purple and fine linen,' and farest 'sumptuously every day,' no doubt many will applaud thy elegance of taste, thy generosity and hospitality. But do not buy their applause so dear. Rather be content with the honor that cometh from God."--Wesley, Works, Sermon 50, "The Use of Money." But in many churches of our time such teaching is disregarded.

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A profession of religion has become popular with the world. Rulers, politicians, lawyers, doctors, merchants, join the church as a means of securing the respect and confidence of society, and advancing their own worldly interests. Thus they seek to cover all their unrighteous transactions under a profession of Christianity. The various religious bodies, re-enforced by the wealth and influence of these baptized worldlings, make a still higher bid for popularity and patronage. Splendid churches, embellished in the most extravagant manner, are erected on popular avenues. The worshipers array themselves in costly and fashionable attire. A high salary is paid for a talented minister to entertain and attract the people. His sermons must not touch popular sins, but be made smooth and pleasing for fashionable ears. Thus fashionable sinners are enrolled on the church records, and fashionable sins are concealed under a pretense of godliness.

Commenting on the present attitude of professed Christians toward the world, a leading secular journal says: "Insensibly the church has yielded to the spirit of the age, and adapted its forms of worship to modern wants." "All things, indeed, that help to make religion attractive, the church now employs as its instruments." And a writer in the New York Independent speaks thus concerning Methodism as it is: "The line of separation between the godly and the

irreligious fades out into a kind of penumbra, and zealous men on both sides are toiling to obliterate all difference between their modes of action and enjoyment." "The popularity of religion tends vastly to increase the number of those who would secure its benefits without squarely meeting its duties."

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Says Howard Crosby: "It is a matter of deep concern that we find Christ's church so little fulfilling the designs of its Lord. Just as the ancient Jews let a familiar intercourse with the idolatrous nations steal away their hearts from God, . . . so the church of Jesus now is, by its false partnerships with an unbelieving world, giving up the divine methods of its true life, and yielding itself to the pernicious, though often plausible, habits of a Christless society, using the arguments and reaching the conclusions which are foreign to the revelation of God, and directly antagonistic to all growth in grace."-- The Healthy Christian: An Appeal to the Church, pages 141, 142.

In this tide of worldliness and pleasure seeking, self-denial and self-sacrifice for Christ's sake are almost wholly lost. "Some of the men and women now in active life in our churches were educated, when children, to make sacrifices in order to be able to give or do something for Christ." But "if funds are wanted now, . . . nobody must be called on to give. Oh, no! have a fair, tableau, mock trial, antiquarian supper, or something to eat--anything to amuse the people."

Governor Washburn of Wisconsin in his annual message, January 9, 1873, declared: "Some law seems to be required to break up the schools where gamblers are made. These are everywhere. Even the church (unwittingly, no doubt) is sometimes found doing the work of the devil. Gift concerts, gift enterprises and raffles, sometimes in aid of religious or charitable objects, but often for less worthy purposes, lotteries, prize packages, etc., are all devices to obtain money without value received. Nothing is so demoralizing or intoxicating, particularly to the young, as the acquisition of money or property without labor. Respectable people engaging in these change enterprises, and easing their consciences with the reflection that the money is to go to a good object, it is not strange that the youth of the state should so often fall into the habits which the excitement of games of hazard is almost certain to engender."

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The spirit of worldly conformity in invading the churches throughout Christendom. Robert Atkins, in a sermon preached in London, draws a dark picture of the spiritual declension that prevails in England: "The truly righteous are diminished from the earth, and no man layeth it to heart. The professors of religion of the present day, in every church, are lovers of the world, conformers to the world, lovers of creature comfort, and aspirers after respectability. They are called to suffer with Christ, but they shrink from even reproach.... Apostasy, apostasy, apostasy, is engraven on the very front of every church; and did they know it, and did they feel it, there might be hope; but, alas! they cry, 'We are rich, and increased in goods, and stand in need of nothing.'" --Second Advent Library, tract No. 39.

The great sin charged against Babylon is that she "made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." This cup of intoxication which she presents to the world represents the false doctrines that she has accepted as the result of her unlawful connection with the great

ones of the earth. Friendship with the world corrupts her faith, and in her turn she exerts a corrupting influence upon the world by teaching doctrines which are opposed to the plainest statements of Holy Writ.

Rome withheld the Bible from the people and required all men to accept her teachings in its place. It was the work of the Reformation to restore to men the word of God; but is it not too true that in the churches of our time men are taught to rest their faith upon their creed and the teachings of their church rather than on the Scriptures? Said Charles Beecher, speaking of the Protestant churches: "They shrink from any rude word against creeds with the same sensitiveness with which those holy fathers would have shrunk from a rude word against the rising veneration of saints and martyrs which they were fostering. . . . The Protestant evangelical denominations have so tied up one another's hands, and their own, that, between them all, a man cannot become a preacher at all, anywhere, without accepting some book besides the Bible.... There is nothing imaginary in the statement that the creed power is now beginning to prohibit the Bible as really as Rome did, though in a subtler way."--Sermon on "The Bible a Sufficient Creed," delivered at Fort Wayne, Indiana, Feb. 22, 1846.

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When faithful teachers expound the word of God, there arise men of learning, ministers professing to understand the Scriptures, who denounce sound doctrine as heresy, and thus turn away inquirers after truth. Were it not that the world is hopelessly intoxicated with the wine of Babylon, multitudes would be convicted and converted by the plain, cutting truths of the word of God. But religious faith appears so confused and discordant that the people know not what to believe as truth. The sin of the world's impenitence lies at the door of the church.

The second angel's message of Revelation 14 was first preached in the summer of 1844, and it then had a more direct application to the churches of the United States, where the warning of the judgment had been most widely proclaimed and most generally rejected, and where the declension in the churches had been most rapid. But the message of the second angel did not reach its complete fulfillment in 1844. The churches then experienced a moral fall, in consequence of their refusal of the light of the advent message; but that fall was not complete. As they have continued to reject the special truths for this time they have fallen lower and lower. Not yet, however, can it be said that "Babylon is fallen,... because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." She has not yet made all nations do this. The spirit of world conforming and indifference to the testing truths for our time exists and has been gaining ground in churches of the Protestant faith in all the countries of Christendom; and these churches are included in the solemn and terrible denunciation of the second angel. But the work of apostasy has not yet reached its culmination.

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The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord, Satan will work "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;" and they that "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," will be left to receive "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. Not until this condition shall be reached, and the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom,

will the fall of Babylon be complete. The change is a progressive one, and the perfect fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 is yet future.

Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their communion. There are many of these who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition and are longing for clearer light. They look in vain for the image of Christ in the churches with which they are connected. As these bodies depart further and further from the truth, and ally themselves more closely with the world, the difference between the two classes will widen, and it will finally result in separation. The time will come when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Revelation 18 points to the time when, as the result of rejecting the threefold warning of Revelation 14:6-12, the church will have fully reached the condition foretold by the second angel, and the people of God still in Babylon will be called upon to separate from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work. When those that "believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:12), shall be left to receive strong delusion and to believe a lie, then the light of truth will shine upon all whose hearts are open to receive it, and all the children of the Lord that remain in Babylon will heed the call: "Come out of her, My people" (Revelation 18:4).